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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001473

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR WATERS/ABRAMS/SINGH

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TAGS: KWBG PGOV PREL PTER IS

SUBJECT: POSITIVE PALESTINIAN REACTION TO PRESIDENT BUSH'S SPEECH; EXCEPT FOR HAMAS

REF: JERUSALEM 1466

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Most West Bank political contacts said they were pleased by President Bush's July 16 speech and praised his call for an international meeting to support progress toward a two-state solution. Most contacts said the speech offers an opportunity to move forward with negotiations. Some contacts said USG efforts to isolate Hamas may garner the faction more popular support. All contacts said that issues such as settlement expansion, land confiscation, the separation barrier, and Jerusalem must be addressed to make any process credible for Palestinians, with some criticizing what they considered a lack of results from previous Quartet and Israeli-Palestinian meetings. Hamas was quick to reject the speech as an intervention in internal Palestinian affairs. Press coverage of the speech is provided reftel. End Summary.

Senior PA Officials Praise Speech

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¶2. (SBU) Nabil Abu Rudaynah, spokesman for President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen), told the press that President Bush's speech offers an historic opportunity to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. PLO Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erekat told the press that "holding the conference will be a cornerstone in peace building efforts" and noted that the agenda for the meeting "must be agreed upon so as to maximize chances of reaching a solution to all disputed issues." Nabil Amr, Presidential advisor to Abu Mazen, told the press that the call to hold a meeting constitutes a qualitative shift in US policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He added that "(The Palestinian leadership) will work with all partners to prepare for this conference, which we believe is a great opportunity to end the occupation." Secretary General of the PLO Executive Committee Yasser Abd Rabbo told the press that the speech is "a real mechanism to end the occupation."

PLO ExComm: Speech Offers an Opportunity;  
Hamas Is Losing Strength in Gaza

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¶3. (C) Ghassan Shaka'a, head of the Arab and International Department of the PLO Executive Committee, told PolOff that President Bush's speech demonstrates US seriousness in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He applauded President Bush for offering support for Abu Mazen and PM Fayyad. "This is an opportunity," he explained, "and we must grab it." Shaka'a said the PA is taking the speech seriously and views the call for an international meeting as "a rescue after Gaza." Shaka'a said progress will be possible with PM

Fayyad because "he is transparent, he believes in the peace process, and he has a political vision."

PLC Members: U.S., Quartet Must Deal with Core Issues, Produce Results

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¶ 14. (C) Bethlehem PLC member Fuad Kokali (Fatah) told PolOff July 17 that he was "pleasantly surprised" by the President's call for an international meeting, describing it as "something new" that will allow the Quartet and Arab League to push both Israelis and Palestinians for change. He said he hopes to see both security and permanent status issues discussed at the international meeting. He said former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's appointment as Quartet Representative is a "good idea" that will energize Quartet efforts. Kokali warned that President Bush's critical remarks about Hamas could backfire, however, and garner more support for the group, as "Palestinians don't trust the U.S." Palestinian People's Party (PPP) chief and PLC member Bassam al-Salhi suggested to PolOff that the USG and Quartet address settlement expansion, land confiscation, the separation barrier, and Jerusalem, saying Palestinians "need action on these issues now and cannot wait until the international meeting in the fall." He said the Arab Peace Initiative should be the basis for the meeting, that Syria and Lebanon should be invited, and that the U.S. should ensure the meeting produces results.

Mainly Positive Reactions from Academic and Civil Society Groups

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JERUSALEM 00001473 002 OF 002

¶ 15. (C) Madhi Abd al-Hadi (PASSIA) told PolOff that he supports President Bush's call for an international meeting and an end to settlement expansion. He criticized what he called the speech's strict divisions between "moderates and extremists," because the speech does not leave room for Hamas to "get on board" and could possibly increase Hamas' extremism. Rami Hamdallah (al-Najah University President) told PolOff that "President Bush has a strong vision for Israel and Palestine" and praised President Bush's commitment to Abu Mazen and his stand against Hamas. He said movement on security and permanent status issues must follow "parallel tracks." Zughbi Zugbhi (Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center) told PolOff that he welcomed the speech, saying President Bush's call for an international meeting will "jumpstart the peace process." He said Palestinians do not put much faith in calls for peace because they have been disappointed at lack of implementation of past agreements and urged the US to push for security reform and economic development.

Hamas Rejects Speech

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¶ 16. (SBU) Hamas was quick to deliver a message of its own following President Bush's speech. Al-Ayyam quotes Hamas spokesman Ismail Radwa rejecting the speech as an intervention in internal Palestinian affairs aimed "only at serving the Zionist enemy." Another Hamas spokesman, Sami Abu Zuhri, was quoted in al-Hayat al-Jadida saying President Bush's call is a "conspiracy to wage a Crusaders war against the Palestinian people."

WALLES